

# Department of Human Services

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## Articles in Today's Clips Friday, August 31, 2007

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## Breaking News: Psychiatrists back Kukla's insanity defense

Jury selection will continue today in the murder trial of a 30-year-old Macomb Township woman who said she killed her two young daughters because "evil voices" told her to do it.

Jennifer Kukla, dressed in civilian clothes for the first time in court, will return to Macomb County Circuit Court this morning for more questioning of potential jurors. Jury selection began Thursday in front of Judge Edward Servitto.

Kukla is charged with first-degree, premeditated murder, but has claimed insanity. The trial will focus on her mental state at the time of the slayings.

Police say Kukla slashed the throats of her daughters, Alexandria, 8, and Ashley, 5, Feb. 4 in her mobile home. She also killed two or three pet dogs and a pet mouse, and sat with her dead children and animals for about 11 hours before her sister arrived.

The trial will differ from most criminal trials in that attorneys will battle primarily over Kukla's state of mind when she committed the slayings.

Court-appointed defense attorney Steven Freers' case is supported by the fact that three psychiatrists who examined Kukla have concluded she was insane when she killed her daughters. Freers must prove Kukla was insane "by the preponderance of the evidence," the same standard as in a civil case, he said.

The psychiatrists are expected to testify about their reports and their evaluations.

Assistant Macomb prosecutor William Cataldo will push for a first-degree conviction, although he could ask the judge to allow the jury to consider second-degree murder.

Cataldo will grill the psychiatric experts in cross-examination to try to show that Kukla understood her actions and is criminally responsible. If she is found not guilty but insane, Kukla would be confined to a psychiatric facility for an indefinite period.

Kukla claimed in her confession to police that "evil voices" told her to kill her children to protect them, police said. She told police the voices started the night before and went from "nice to evil," said Detective Mark Grammatico of the Macomb County Sheriff's Department during Kukla's preliminary examination in June. A voice told her to "go kill all my kids before somebody kills them," the detective testified.

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[http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/083107/loc\\_20070831011.shtml](http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/083107/loc_20070831011.shtml)

Detroit Free Press

August 31, 2007

## **WARREN: Mom headed for trial in beating death of son**

Crystal Conklin will stand trial in the June death of her toddler, a Macomb County District judge ruled Wednesday.

Conklin is accused of fatally beating her 2-year-old son, Sean Sowards, who arrived at a hospital in a coma. Doctors determined he had been bashed in the head.

He also had dozens of bruises on his body.

Judge Walter Jakubowski bound Conklin over to circuit court on charges of first-degree murder and first-degree child abuse.

Compiled by Steve Neavling, Christy Arboscello and Amber Hunt.

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Article published Aug 31, 2007  
Youth pastor sends sex case to trial  
**Trace Christenson**  
*The Enquirer*

A Battle Creek youth pastor charged with using the Internet to solicit sex from a child has waived the case to Calhoun County Circuit Court for trial.

Troy Deal, 34, agreed Thursday to the waiver of his preliminary examination in district court.

Deal, on paid leave as director of youth ministries at Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, is charged with 11 counts, including:

- Using a computer to communicate with another to solicit child sexually abusive activity
- Using a computer to communicate with another to solicit child sexually abusive material
- Using computers to communicate with another to accost a child for immoral purposes.

He was arrested July 18.

The Michigan attorney general's office alleges the crimes occurred between November 2005 and April 2007. Deal allegedly was communicating with an investigator from the attorney general's office, though the charges allege he thought the person was a 14-year-old girl.

If convicted, Deal faces up to 20 years in prison.

During a brief hearing before District Judge Frank Line, Deal's attorney, R. Scott Coleman, said negotiations on a possible plea are ongoing but Deal has not yet been offered anything.

Coleman also asked that Deal be allowed to spend time unsupervised with his two children, ages 3 years and six months, which Line approved.

But the judge told Coleman that Deal would not be allowed to begin a college class on computer repair and technology until the judge learned more about the class.

Kelly Carter, an attorney with the attorney general's office, said her office objected to Deal having any access to a computer.

He remains free on \$50,000 bond.

*Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or [tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com](mailto:tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com).*

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## Detroit resident mistakenly declared dead

*Associated Press - August 31, 2007 7:34 AM ET*

DETROIT (AP) - A letter from the state declares Robert Thomas is dead.

But news of his death have been exaggerated. Thomas says he's very much alive.

He thought the letter from the state Human Services Department was amusing, at first. But the Detroit resident isn't laughing now.

Thomas says he was told the problem would be corrected in a few days. Instead, he says he received notice that his Medicaid coverage was being canceled due to his death.

Thomas is a diabetic. He says he need Medicaid to supplement more than \$1,000 a month on insulin and other medication.

A reporter contacted Human Services, which confirmed the death notice was a mistake.

The state has apologized and promises to restore Thomas' medical benefits by next week.

Information from: WDIV-TV, <http://www.wdiv.com>

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# ClickOnDetroit.com

## Man Alive, Well Declared Dead By State

POSTED: 6:04 pm EDT August 30, 2007

UPDATED: 7:16 pm EDT August 30, 2007

Robert Thomas' is dead, according to a letter he received from the state.

Thomas' who is alive said he received the letter and thought it was funny.

"At first it was amusing to see I was legally dead," Thomas said about the letter sent in June. " Now, the joke is over and I need help."

A representative for the Michigan Department of Human Services said the state mistakenly sent Thomas a letter informing him he had died.

Thomas, a Detroit resident, was told the problem would be corrected in three or four days. Instead, according to Thomas, he was notified that his Medicaid coverage was being canceled due to his death.

Thomas said he is a diabetic and that he spends more than \$1,000 a month on insulin and other medications. He said he couldn't afford his medication without the help of Medicaid.

Thomas said he called WDIV Local 4 News because he was desperate for help. A Local 4 reporter contacted the Department Of Human Services, which confirmed the death notice was a mistake. The state has apologized to Thomas and promised to have his Medical benefits restored by next week.

Stay with Local 4 and ClickOnDetroit.com for further updates.

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### RELATED TO STORY



**Video: Man Alive, Well After Declared Dead By State**

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Article published Aug 31, 2007  
Man struggles to prove he's alive  
Associated Press

DETROIT — News of Robert Thomas' death has been greatly exaggerated.

Thomas thought the letter from the Michigan Department of Human Services was amusing — at first. But the Detroit resident isn't laughing now.

Thomas said he was told the problem would be corrected in a few days. Instead, he said he received notice that his Medicaid coverage was being canceled due to his death.

Thomas is a diabetic who needs Medicaid to supplement more than \$1,000 a month for insulin and other medications, WDIV-TV reported.

The state has apologized and promises to restore Thomas' medical benefits by next week.

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**ourMidland.com**  
from the Midland Daily News

08/31/2007

## Teens charged with damage to remain in custody

By [Angela E. Lackey](#)

Two Midland teenagers charged with vandalizing three local schools will remain at the Juvenile Care Center for now.

Midland County Probate Court attorney referee Linda Weiss ruled at the continued preliminary hearings Thursday that the two 15-year-old teenagers should remain in custody both because of the seriousness of the offenses and that they pose a risk to the community. The two teens had separate hearings, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

The two boys each are charged with 10 felony counts for the Aug. 19 vandalism at Eastlawn and Carpenter elementary schools and Central Middle School. Damage included drinking fountains being torn off walls, broken windows, destroyed equipment and more. Damage is estimated at \$200,000. The school district's insurance has agreed to treat the vandalism of the three schools as one incident, so the district will only have to pay one \$10,000 deductible.

A 13-year-old Livingston County boy was the third teenager charged with 10 felony counts for the vandalism. He has been released to the custody of his father. His case was transferred Aug. 23 to that county's court.

One felony count is safe breaking and carries a sentence of life or any number of years in adult court. Prosecutor Mike Carpenter said it hasn't been decided yet whether either Midland teenager will be charged as an adult for that offense.

Probation officer Daniel Godwin said at the morning hearing that the teenager before Weiss has been cooperative and polite, and that he is attending school at the JCC. It was pointed out that this teenager has no previous record and was a good student before the vandalism.

Godwin recommended continued detention at this time and the administration of two tests which will determine what services the teenager needs to be rehabilitated and the teen's mental health. Both the prosecutor's office and the teenager's attorney agreed to both recommendations. Weiss said these tests will not be used to determine the teen's guilt or innocence.

The second hearing was in the afternoon and little was said during it.

Weiss recommended an Act 150 placement because of this teen's previous criminal history, which could mean he would be placed outside the home and get services through the state Department of Human Services. The teenager is on probation for an unrelated offense.

Pretrial hearings for the two Midland teenagers are scheduled for 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m., Sept. 19.

	<b>Jason P. Gower</b> Criminal Defense Lawyer	
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# ARTICLE FROM THE CRAWFORD COUNTY AVALANCHE

Thursday, August 30, 2007

## Shawano and Nokomis to close?

To the editor:

As a former member of the Citizen's Advisory Committee at Nokomis Challenge Center in Houghton Lake, I was shocked when I heard rumors that that center might close. I was also concerned because I am a member of several community groups who have benefited from the work that the juveniles do in our community.

These concerns prompted me to investigate the future status of Nokomis. I checked with the MI Dept. of Human Services and Nokomis. My research revealed that two house bills #222 and #232 would result in the closing of Nokomis along with Shawano Center in Crawford County. Both bills are supported by our district's senator, Michelle McManus.

Her support to end funding for the district's two public juvenile treatment facilities ought to frighten northern Michigan residents. Closing or privatizing Shawano Center in Crawford County and Nokomis Challenge Center in Roscommon County would put 80 juvenile delinquents, many of them sex offenders and drug addicts, back on the streets of communities without first completing their rehabilitations. It would inundate local school districts with special education and high risk students, and would eliminate millions of dollars in payroll money from reaching northern Michigan businesses.

Whether a merchant, profes-

sional, teacher, mechanic, or just a taxpayer trying to live out a peaceful retirement, Michelle McManus's lack of support for these public facilities will cost us.

McManus has not explained her bizarre stance on this issue, except in vague terms in defense of balancing the state budget, which in fact is the last thing that privatization will do. From a senator that most think has done a fairly good job during her tenure, this sudden left turn into the anti-business and free the felons' lane is mystifying. It is difficult to state who is being served by this - someone is being served - but it is certainly not the citizen's of northern Michigan.

What will occur if Shawano and Nokomis are closed?

At least 74 un-rehabilitated juvenile offenders - most of them felons would be sent home or to community-based placements. Some of those homes and placements are in your neighborhood. Last month, only five of the 80 youths currently in placement at these medium secure facilities could have been absorbed by the private system operating in the state. That was the sum of their open beds. Further, it is a myth that Shawano or Nokomis could be converted into private facilities overnight, if ever, because of lease and property, logistical labor and licensing factors. Where would the clients go? They would live next door to you.

If, for the sake of argument, private local providers were developed over time to house and treat the delinquents, local taxpayers would bear increased costs.

Private providers of medium secure placement beds use local public schools at the local school's expense to provide education and special education services to the clients. Could Houghton Lake or Grayling schools, and taxpayers, afford 40 special needs students each? In addition, per diem, the cost to house, treat and care for one youth for one day, is as much and often more at a private provider than at Nokomis or Shawano, once the "hidden" taxpayer cost of schooling, medical services and the other expenses are counted. Privatization does not save money.

Northern Michigan businesses lose. There are approximately 90 full and part-time personnel working at the two centers. These individuals buy cars, groceries, medical services, clothes and the usual consumer products. They go out to dinner. They support local churches and charities and pay local taxes. In all, they spend almost \$4 million annually in our communities. McManus wants to send that away. Not surprisingly, pay structures at private facilities are notably too heavy. The CEO of one private treatment provider listed income over \$320,000 last year - more than twice the governor's salary,

while front line workers in his facilities made just over minimum wage. That, apparently, is what privatization would bring to northern Michigan, one or two fat cats and lots of folks just a short step away from welfare.

The programs currently operated at Nokomis and Shawano are the leanest, cost effective programs in Michigan, public or private. It is senseless to support any initiative that would end funding to these facilities. Our leaders need to help northern Michigan interests by supporting funding for these programs. McManus campaigned on a platform of government and fiscal responsibility, protection and support of northern Michigan families, and promotion of business interests in northern Michigan. Her refusal to vote for funding for Shawano and Nokomis does none of these things.

If you value your safety and business health in northern Michigan, and fiscal responsibility throughout the state, then please let you state representative and senator know that support for these bills and initiatives are wrong. Michelle McManus phone 517-373-1725 or Senator Michelle McManus P.O. Box 30036, Lansing, MI 48909-7536 or State Representative Joel Sheltrown by email joelsheltrown@house.mi.gov.

Tom Borton  
Houghton Lake

## **Michigan native El DeBarge arrested in domestic violence case**

Grand Haven tribune

Thu, Aug 30, 2007

LOS ANGELES (AP) — El DeBarge was arrested over the weekend for investigation of domestic violence, authorities said.

DeBarge, 46, whose real first name is Eldra, was arrested Sunday in Lancaster, said Deputy Eric Eitner of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Details surrounding the arrest weren't released.

The R&B singer was being held without bail because he had two previous warrants for his arrest in narcotics cases, said sheriff's spokesman Deputy Tony Moore.

A representative for DeBarge couldn't immediately be found for comment.

The singer led the family band DeBarge in the '80s before going solo. The group was known for hits such as "Who's Holding Donna Now?" and "Rhythm of the Night."

DeBarge was arrested in Grand Rapids, Mich., in 1996 and ordered to pay back child support for his daughter. Ten years earlier, the Michigan native pleaded no contest in Grand Rapids to a charge of creating a disturbance after a college student accused him of assaulting her.

Three of his brothers — Chico, Robert and Thomas — have served jail time on cocaine-related convictions.



## Spare poor

State income tax credit promised - and needed

### FLINT

#### THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, August 31, 2007

Of all possible ways to alleviate Michigan's budget problems, the first to be avoided should be schemes to exact extra revenue from the working poor.

Yet that is precisely what a Republican-backed proposal in the state Senate would do by delaying the onset of a promised earned income tax credit - meant to give relief to the lowest-paid workers who nonetheless struggle to carry their own weight within Michigan's poor economy.

State Sen. Nancy Cassis, R-Novi, would hold back this small relief, not just for one year, but until the state's "rainy day" surplus is restored to a hefty \$250 million - a level of cushioning that Michigan hasn't seen since 2001.

The impending state tax credit would be complementary to a federal tax credit, also available to low-income workers filing returns. The state credit would amount to 10 percent of the federal one in the 2008 tax year, and 20 percent in 2009 and thereafter. For most desperately poor workers, this could put a few hundred extra dollars in their pockets - a sum that could mean a lifeline purchase, such as a furnace or car repair, or perhaps medical treatment.

As Democrats opposing the delay point out, the money granted by this means is apt to be put right back into the economy anyway, with the beneficiaries purchasing goods and services in the commercial market.

It's curious that lawmakers such as Cassis are willing to postpone this tax break for the working poor, but seem unwilling to touch the incomes of others by restoring the income tax rollbacks of recent years. That paring resulted in Michigan's income levy being lowered to 3.9 percent from 4.4 percent. Why not restore all or part of that as a way to help solve a \$1.8-billion shortfall in next year's budget?

Instead, Cassis cynically refers to these working poor as just one more "special interest" among many seeking relief. But of all the groups she might be thinking, she's trying to penalize the most vulnerable and least able to lobby.

Fortunately, those who work hard but still struggle with poverty have a voice within the Legislature, which seems ready to block this regressive measure.

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#### QUICK TAKE

##### The issue

- Tax break: A new state tax credit aimed at low-income workers is scheduled to take effect in January, potentially benefiting more than 600,000 Michigan households.

No tax break: Legislation in the state Senate would delay the credit from taking effect until state government's financial situation improves.

What's being said: Critics say the bill would unfairly hurt the working poor by keeping them from getting much-needed tax relief, while backers say Michigan can't afford to lose the revenue that would come with the tax refunds.

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## No proof of racial bias at Kent County DHS

Friday, August 31, 2007

By Kyla King

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A state investigation into allegations of widespread racial harassment of employees at Kent County's Department of Human Services found no direct proof minorities were treated differently.

But investigators concluded inconsistent and sometimes "unsound" management practices, a general lack of trust and poor communication have fueled perceptions that racial bias exists.

Department Director Andrew Zylstra said he was pleased the report, released Thursday, did not find proof of racial bias. But he said he regrets he did not do a better job of responding to the concerns and perceptions of his minority employees.

"I think where we fell short was communication with people that felt that way, and dealing with some of their feelings and some of what they saw as evidence of that," Zylstra said.

"I don't want anybody coming to work feeling they're going to be picked on."

The eight-week probe was in response to complaints made earlier this year by black employees to Kent County Commissioners Paul Mayhue and Jim Vaughn.

The employees complained black caseworkers at DHS were harassed, denied promotions, subjected to more performance-related actions, given less credibility when complaints were filed, and offered less security when threatened than white caseworkers.

Mayhue said Thursday he believes it was impossible for investigators to prove many of the allegations because most of them happened during informal interactions that would not have been documented by supervisors.

He said regardless of what state investigators found, the report reinforces "there is something going on that needs to be fixed."

"I think it's a step in the right direction, but (Zylstra) has to mean what he says," Mayhue said.

The report was done by a team of investigators from the state Department of Human Service's Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity, who began interviewing 51 workers, supervisors and managers in March. Participants were asked to discuss their experiences and perceptions and offer recommendations.

The report includes five recommendations to improve the work environment and requires the department to assemble a group of supervisors, employee union representatives and state officials to implement them. The panel has until Nov. 1 to come up with a plan that requires them to submit monthly reports to the state.

Mayhue said he and employees he has spoken with are concerned Zylstra will have too much control over that group. And he worries the report was "watered down" because Zylstra and union officials were given the chance to review it before it was released and suggest changes in wording.

"You can take a word and flip a report on its head," Mayhue said.

But DHS spokeswoman Karen Stock said Zylstra and the union only were able to make "minor, non-

substantive" changes.

"Many suggestions were not adopted," she said.

Zylstra speculated the stress employees face in the understaffed office contributed to the perceptions of racial bias. He noted caseworkers are must juggle 300 cash assistance cases and assist as many as 800 others with food stamps, Medicaid and earned-income credit claims.

"We've got a lot of employees here under a lot of pressure," Zylstra said.

Almost 26 percent of the department's 409 employees are minorities. That compares with a minority population of 13.9 percent in an area that includes Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland and Newaygo, the areas from which the county draws employees.

Zylstra said he is proud of his staff's diversity, though he would like to see more minorities in higher-level positions.

Stock said countywide investigations are uncommon but not unheard of.

The case is being monitored by Daryle Salisbury, a Novi attorney who filed a lawsuit in 2006 on behalf of several minority male employees in DHS offices near Lansing and Detroit. The suit, which alleges similar discrimination, since has become a class action case, and Salisbury expects some employees from Kent County's DHS could join the case this fall.

"The standard operating procedure for the department seems to be we'll sit down, talk about things, we'll investigate and then they won't do anything. That's why this lawsuit got filed," Salisbury said. "It will be interesting to find out what happens."

**Send e-mail to the author: [kking@grpress.com](mailto:kking@grpress.com)**

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## Discrimination at the local DHS?

Updated: Aug 30, 2007 06:33 PM EDT

By DAN BEWLEY

**GRAND RAPIDS** - A state investigation of the Kent County Department of Human Services did not find any overt racism, it did find several problems.

The investigation began after several African-American employees complained of a racist environment at the Kent County DHS, calling it a hostile workplace.

Over 400 people work at the Kent County DHS at 415 Franklin SE. Of those, 26 percent are minorities, many of whom said the environment is not good for African-Americans.

They allege African-American employees were held to a different standard on attendance or reporting to work on time. They claim their work was micro-managed, they were not allowed to hold conversations in the hallways, and they were not being promoted to supervisory positions.

Andy Zylstra has been the director for a decade. For the past year, his office has been under investigation by state officials. He's stung by the accusations.

"Workers are under a lot of pressure," Zylstra said. "I think in that kind of environment emotions run high. Perceptions of why things happen may get distorted from what's reality."

The investigation found different treatment did happen among employees, but found no evidence of any racial discrimination. The state report recommended the Kent County DHS implement more programs to get more employees involved to improve morale.

Zylstra welcomes the findings and looks forward to coming up with a different approach.

"I don't know if it's a lack of communication, it's just not effective at this point," he said, "so we'll have to find better ways to communicate."

The office is creating a detailed plan of changes, scheduled to be finished by the beginning of November.



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Published August 31, 2007

#### The plan

- Workers would be eligible if their age and years of service equaled at least 75.
- Workers would have to retire by Dec. 31 unless an extension was approved.
- The pension would be based on final average compensation, years of service and a factor of 1.75 percent. The current factor is 1.5 percent.

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## Senate bill would let a quarter of state workers retire early

Chris Andrews  
Lansing State Journal

Thousands of veteran state workers - more than 25 percent of them - could get enhanced pension benefits under an early retirement bill that passed the state Senate on Thursday.

The Senate voted 21-16 for the measure, which Senate Majority Leader Michael Bishop said would shrink government and help resolve the state's budget crisis.

Steve Kratzer, 53, who has worked in environmental programs for the state for 29 years, said the plan would save the state money and give workers like him the opportunity for new challenges.

"My job has morphed into a situation where you come in eight hours a day and sit in front of a computer. There's no reason to get up and move, get away from your chair, move from your desk," said Kratzer, a mercury pollution prevention and policy specialist for the Department of Environmental Quality. He said budget cuts have caused departments to cut back on training and travel.

"I do a lot of policy work and deal with a lot of different states and associations, but I can't travel to participate on the boards that I'm assigned to," he said.

#### Governor opposed

However, Gov. Jennifer Granholm remains strongly opposed to an early retirement program.

"An early out will result in more children left unprotected, more gas pumps and bridges left uninspected, fewer state police patrolling our roads," Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said.

Under the early retirement plan, state workers would be eligible if their age and years of service add up to at least 75.

Currently workers must be at least 55 years old with 30 years of service or 60 years old with 10 years of service for full retirement benefits.

The plan sweetens the retirement benefit by increasing the pension formula by 16.7 percent. It is similar to plans offered several times in the past.

Pensions would be based on years of service multiplied by the worker's final average salary times 1.75 percent - up from the current factor of 1.5 percent.

Whether there are savings will depend on how many workers retire and how many are replaced.

### **15,000 eligible**

The Senate Fiscal Agency estimated that nearly 12,000 employees would be eligible based on age and years of service, and another 3,100 could qualify by purchasing service credits.

If the state replaced one in four workers at the minimum end of the salary scale, it could save about \$190 million annually, according to the analysis.

State Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, has introduced similar legislation in the House. He supports an early retirement program even if the state only breaks even.

"This state is extremely hurting for jobs. We are exporting our children," he said.

State budget director Robert Emerson said the early retirement would seriously hurt the state's ability to deliver services. He called it "term limits for the bureaucracy."

State Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, said it would set up state government for failure.

But Kratzer, a Department of Environmental Quality employee, said he believes the state work force can adjust to another early retirement.

"We've been able to reorganize and transition, and I think we bounced back from the last early out," he said. "I think we are stronger and more resilient as a work force, more efficient and effective than we've ever been."

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or [candrews@lsj.com](mailto:candrews@lsj.com).





## Republicans back bill allowing state workers to retire early

8/30/2007, 1:55 p.m. ET

By **DAVID EGGERT**  
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Nearly 15,000, or 28 percent, of state workers would be eligible to retire early under legislation that won approval Thursday from the Republican-led Senate, despite Democrats' objections.

The bill, approved 21-16 along party lines, does not specify how many retiring employees would be replaced, a number that would be negotiated by lawmakers and Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm's administration if the bill becomes law.

Republicans said the legislation could save money and would avoid having to lay off employees during state government's financial crisis.

"It allows us to downsize (government) in a reasonable way," said Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester.

Democrats, however, called the proposal shortsighted and reckless and argued the state would need to replace employees who retire early.

"In reality, these early outs won't really save us money. They will cost us money," said Sen. Michael Switalski, D-Roseville.

Granholm's budget director, Bob Emerson, also opposed the idea.

In 2002, about 8,000 state workers took an early retirement — which critics said led to the loss of expertise in key state service areas.

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JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW  
DIRECTOR



The Michigan  
**Heart Gallery**

## News Release

Contact: Jan Berry (517) 373-7394 or Regina Funkhouser, MI Heart Gallery Coordinator (800) 589-6273

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### **2007 Michigan Heart Gallery on Display in Ypsilanti**

*Public to view professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption*

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**August 30, 2007**

YPSILANTI – “What I want for myself in this life is a family . . . .”

The statement above was made by 16 year-old Danielle, who is waiting to be adopted. Many of us take being part of a family for granted. A family provides the simplest comforts like having someone who cares where you are and asks, “How was your day?”

Today in Michigan there are more than 4,000 children without families. These children wait and hope every day for someone to adopt them and give them families of their own. Most of these children are not newborns or infants, but older children; many live with the trauma of abuse and neglect, have medical issues, or need special help.

Some of the children waiting to be adopted are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The 2007 Michigan Heart Gallery will be on display from September 1 through September 23 at Ypsilanti District Library, 5577 Whittaker Road, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. An adoption information event is scheduled for September 23 from 2pm - 4pm in the Community Room of the Ypsilanti District Library.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network, and the Michigan Department of Human Services, seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for permanent homes. The Michigan Heart Gallery features professional photos of some of Michigan's waiting children, who come from various regions of the state. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.

The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by dozens of professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. These kids were actively involved in the photo shoot experience some selecting which portrait to feature in the Heart Gallery, and others coming up with their own poses and settings.

"Most of the children featured in the Heart Gallery have been waiting for a long time to find a family of their own," Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said. "While we hope children featured in the exhibit will find families, the larger goal of the Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children, who need families, then they may be forgotten. The Heart Gallery is an amazing undertaking and we are thrilled the public will have an opportunity to view these portraits, get to know the children and possibly take action to see if adoption may be right for them."

These waiting children have simple requests. "I would like to live with a nice family that would let me play on the football team," explains one boy. "My best thoughts about getting a family is that I hope they are nice," shares another.

Some of the children in the Michigan Heart Gallery have been waiting to be adopted for several years and are now teenagers. Each year, approximately 450 Michigan children between the ages of 18 and 21, leave the foster care system because of their age. These youths do not have a family to stand up at their wedding, a place to go home for the holidays, or a family safety net of any kind. The Michigan Heart Gallery seeks to encourage prospective parents to adopt an older child, so these children can have a vital connection to a supportive adult during adolescence, as young adults, and beyond.

Another piece of the Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery features three families that have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system.

"These families show others that it is possible to build a wonderful family through adoption," Udow said. "Despite the rough times they might have faced in the past, they prove how much love and care can do for these children."

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Since 2001, the Heart Gallery has expanded to other states and cities.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit the Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at [www.miheart.org](http://www.miheart.org)

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